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ORIGINAL PAPER

On Civil Society Governance: An Emergent Research Field

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Introduction

The scholarly interest in governance has peaked remarkably within the social sciences in the last couple of decades (Kitthananan 2006; Kjaer 2004; Pierre 2000). The multi-faceted usage of the governance concept found in the study of civil society indicates that more than one phenomenon is in fact being addressed, and that several different approaches are taken at the same time. For students of civil society organizations (CSOs) in particular, two main strands of research dealing with the idea and concept of governance seem to be of interest. The first one focuses on what we may call "external governance" and is concerned with the processes through which societies are governed. Increasingly, institutional mechanisms other than those of the state, such as civil society and the market sector, are involved in processes of external governance (Bozzini and Enjolras 2011; Rhodes 1997). This has entailed an increased political and scholarly interest in how CSOs are involved in governance. The second strand of governance scholarship deals instead with

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organizational ("internal") governance. Here questions are typically raised about particular modes of internal governance and their efficiency, with a particular interest for the role of the board (Ostrower and Stone 2006). While in the first of these two genres, there is a dominance of political scientists, scholars with a background in management studies, law or economics, tend to dominate the other. Both strands of literature are quite rich and well-developed in their own right, although the concept of governance might not always be the one preferred by the authors. It is however less common for governance scholars to engage in debate across this field border, or to address issues seen as central in the other field.

In this introduction to this special issue, we want to emphasize that the sphere of civil society is unique in that these dimensions of governance are closely intertwined: the internal governance game shapes the conditions for the organization's positions and actions in the external governance environment, and vice versa. Therefore, these two dimensions need to be analyzed together or at least with the other aspect in mind while conceptualizing governance. In this, the cross-disciplinary field of civil society research differs from the way in which the governance concept has been applied both in the study of politics (where researchers tend to lean more toward the external aspect of the concept and much less toward the organizational dimension) and in business studies (where focus is often placed on the internal dimension). Stone and Ostrower (2007) have argued along similar lines for a broadening of the scope of the nonprofit literature in order to address the interaction between nonprofit governance and the wider society. From this standpoint, they develop a range of implications for future nonprofit governance research: the need to analyze the interaction between nonprofits and their environment, the need to conceptualize governance as a complex and multi-layered process involving a range of different actors, and the need to analyze the outcomes of different modes of governance in more specific ways (Stone and Ostrower 2007).

We hope that our contribution as well as the other articles in this special issue on governance in CSOs may contribute to moving forward the agenda of conceptualizing CSO governance as an internal–external relationship and to broaden the scope of CSO governance research. Such an approach, we argue, is fruitful in order to highlight both the mutual dependence of external and internal governance and the inherent contradictions that this double relationship entails.

Civil Society Governance as a Scholarly and a Political Concept

In the current academic debate it is not uncommon to raise the question whether governance is a fruitful concept given its fuzziness and its polysemy (Gaudin 2002; Hugues 2010; Weiss 2000). The academic origins of the word are in themselves multiple, and include private governance (Graz and Nölke 2008), transnational governance (Jönsson and Tallberg 2010) as well as economic global governance (Djelic and Quack 2010), just to mention a few. Within scholarly work on governance, we can find influences from the field of corporate governance research (Berle and Means 2009) as well as from research on public governance (Kooiman

1993; Osborne 2010), democratic governance (March 1995) and from what has increasingly has been known as multilevel governance (Rhodes 1997).

Currently, there is a strong general interest in governance both inside and outside of the academic world. Politicians, managers of private firms, as well as leaders of international institutions have for a period of time been using the concept of "good governance" as a portmanteau-word. Fraud and scandals have had an impact also on civil society and its organizations, sometimes leading up to the introduction of new regulative instruments such as the Sarbanes–Oxley Act in the U.S. (Ostrower and Bobowick 2006). The calls for increased transparency, better governance structures and other kinds of external regulations have also reached civil society and its organizations. An interesting observation is that one important role traditionally often assigned to CSOs is the function as whistle-blowers or watchdogs in society (in their external governance capacity) but with this new wave and call for internal or organizational governance it is now time for many organizations themselves to be regulated and controlled.

On a more general level, the renewed interest in internal CSO governance must be understood in relation to thoroughgoing transformations in public governance in recent years, what Bozzini and Enjolras term 'a post-political search for effective regulation and accountability' (2011, p. 12). These transformed modes of governance imply an increasing interweaving and involvement between the public sector, the business sector and civil society. Implied in this development is the emergence of new forms of coordination, notably networks and partnerships, that replace more centralized and hierarchical forms of governance (Torfing and Sørensen 2007). There exists by now an increasingly rich strand of research that focuses on this external governance game shaping society, in which civil society organizations (CSOs) are understood to take an active part in a wider governance environment (Anheier and Daly 2007; Boli and Thomas 1999; Kennett 2008; Pierre and Peters 2000; Rosenau and Czempiel 1992). This approach is often applied in policy studies, where an "ever-increasing variety of terrains and actors involved in the making of public policy" (Richards and Smith 2002 quoted in Kitthananan 2006, p. 2) has made researchers aware of the need for another concept than "government" to deal with the processes in question. With their now almost classical notion of "governance without government", (Rosenau and Czempiel 1992) strived to include both new problem-solving mechanisms and the existence of new non-state actors in the analysis of an increasingly more complex governance environment previously limited to the nation-state and its agents. In this context, the term "governance" is used more or less as a shorthand to describe the different ways in which societies can organize (and through this, govern) themselves to accomplish their goals, and it is now, as argued eloquently by (Djelic 2006), time to look in greater detail at the different actors participating in these governance arrangements. We still need to better understand the identity of these players, the ways in which they interact with each other as well as how they construct and re-construct themselves in this interaction, as also noted by (Reuter 2011).

Changes in public governance are, however, not the only set of factors influencing the internal governance of CSOs. It could be argued that the current interest in governance in the world of nonprofit and voluntary organizations

(Cornforth 2003) reflects a number of problems or challenges confronting civil society and its organizations. These challenges include (but are not limited to): (a) Cutbacks and changes in the transfer of economic resources from government and public sector sources experienced by CSOs in several countries. The decrease or transformation of public subsidies has been followed by a tougher control on the effectiveness of CSOs' actions and increased requests for so called "good governance". (b) A general trend of new demands for accountability and transparency from many different actors in the immediate environment of the CSOs. (c) An increasing corporate model isomorphism noticed in many organizations and a particular need to coordinate new partnerships with for-profit organizations. (d) The recent blurring of boundaries between sectors and organizational logics identified by several scholars, which often seems to result in the increase of the service component (and hence a different governance logic) in CSOs.

To an increasing extent this more complex environment is reflected also in studies of internal governance in CSOs. In particular, studies of how external governance affects internal governance are gaining in importance, treating for example the effects of enhanced control mechanisms and the consequences of increasingly disparate demands placed upon CSOs (Billis 2010). Still, it may be argued that the main emphasis of internal governance studies are on sets of internal factors influencing the running of the organizations. As explained and summarized nicely by Hughes (2010): "Governance is about running organizations, about setting up structures to enable the organization to be run." While external governance perspectives have their departure point in earlier government studies, an important source of influence for the study of internal governance in the case of voluntary and non-profit actors has often been models imported from the growing field of corporate governance studies. They have focused on the need for more rigorous governance and transparency solutions for commercial and for-profit corporations in the wake of scandals like the frauds associated with the fall of Enron, as well as the more recent global financial crisis. In the particular case of CSOs, be it charities and other non-profit institutions, voluntary associations or social movement organizations, questions raised in this line of research have typically concerned the composition and mandate of a CSO's board; to whom the CSO is accountable (i.e., who is the "principle"); or how the board-executive relations are organized (Herman and Heimovics 1994; Jegers 2009; Middleton 1987; Stone and Ostrower 2007).

We believe that the challenges outlined above all have implications for both the internal and the external side of civil society governance, that are not fully captured through focusing on the impact of external governance on internal governance, but which require that the two-way interaction of external and internal governance is taken more explicitly into account. As pointed out by Bozzini and Enjolras new forms of governance entails tensions and ambiguities between the old and the new, and between diverging criteria of success and accountability (2011, p. 18). A particular set of problems may be posed between the intertwining of hierarchical and network modes of governance, which entail ambiguous situations. Moreover, the legitimacy of both earlier internal governance arrangements, and of the positions

held and roles played by civil society actors in the global, regional or national governance environments, are at stake as new actors enter the game and new mechanisms for governing are coming into fashion.

In order enhance research on this new environment for governance, in which external and internal governance interact reciprocally, we believe that there is a need for a conceptualization of the organizational distinctiveness of civil society. Such a conceptualization needs to span across different sub-fields of the civil society sector and address the nonprofit or charity segment of civil society as well as social movements and voluntary associations. The organizations populating civil society are mostly not so clear-cut that they will fall into one of these categories only but instead exhibit features from several traditions, often dressed in the language of "charity speak" as well as "movement talk", which tend to increase with the current tendencies for sector blurs and hybrid organizational solutions (Smith and Smyth 2010; Wijkström 2011). There is a sliding scale where voluntary associations as well as organizations sprung out of the different social movements are closer to the external, societal, governance environment where their advocacy or voice capacity is especially pronounced and acknowledged, while charities and traditional nonprofit institutions—often aimed at the provision and delivery of welfare services—might not always have the same external governance impact, but nevertheless need internal "systems of rules" to govern the organization and eventually insure the survival of it.

The analytical tool box of such an approach would include, above all, recognition of a particular set of governance structures specific to CSOs, as discussed by Enjolras (2009). These structures reinforce a norm of reciprocity and thus make possible the pooling of resources and facilitate collective action, Enjolras notes. The governance structures in this account include particular ends, types of ownership and distribution, norms for decision-making, control and accountability mechanisms and embedded incentives in the analysis of CSOs. These governance structures are flexible and may operate and draw resources from multiple environments. Factors such as trustworthiness are also crucial for the efficiency and survival of CSOs (Enjolras 2009).

The Contributions of This Special Issue

The set of texts in this special issue illustrates the interdisciplinary character of current scholarly work on governance in CSOs. The issue thus encompasses such varied approaches as psychological contract theory, institutional theory, economic theory, discourse theory and theories derived from classical management approaches. This variety of approaches opens up interesting perspectives, both on the distinctiveness of CSO governance and on how external and internal governance are interlinked. While some of the special issue contributions address the question of external influences and their consequences directly (for example, Lang and Roessl, and Vantilborgh, Bidee, Pepermans, Willems, Huybrechts and Jegers), other contributions expand on the internal–external dimension, for example by discussing the composition of boards in the light of how they relate (or should relate) to

external stakeholders (Young, Rehli and Jäger). This special issue also includes a set of articles that explores the cultural, discursive and historical context in which CSO governance takes place, thus adding to our understanding of how internal processes are never unrelated to external factors (Maier and Meyer, Einarsson, Vercher and Chemin).

As we conceive it, the most central contributions of these texts to the literatures on CSO governance are the following. *First*, this special issue contributes to the discussion about the importance of constituencies to the governance of CSOs and about how and in what sense the aims of CSOs are a public matter. The two articles by Young and by Rehli and Jäger, respectively, approach these questions through a discussion of the composition of boards.

Young argues that the present system of nonprofit governance in the U.S. does not take the composition of constituencies into account to a sufficient extent. In a system where there is no clear link between the contributions of stakeholders and their representation in the organization, appointed, and elected trustees may end up having too little stake in the organization's mission, resulting in free-riding and underdevelopment of the organization's potential resources and mission-related effectiveness. Young thus proposes a 'stakeholder governance model', where stakeholders are represented in the board according to the resources they contribute to the organization. He argues that such a model would lead to enhanced mobilization of resources for nonprofits, and also, to a greater pluralism in the composition of boards.

Rehli and *Jäger*'s paper dovetails nicely with Young's argument by providing an empirical study of whether and how governance systems are related to the particular constituencies of CSOs. Starting from a resource dependency perspective, they ask whether CSOs establish governance systems that reflect the importance of different types of resources; by electing boards through democratic elections where membership fees are a dominant resource, and by nominating boards that represent central stakeholders where donors and philanthropists provide important resources. In their study, Rehli and Jäger show that individual members, regional member organizations, and governmental donors hold a stronger position in the governance of INGOs than philanthropists, foundations and volunteers, notwithstanding the resources that these entities represent. This leads the authors to ask whether there is generally a possible mismatch between the governance systems and the resource structures of CSOs, or whether the choice of governance systems rather reflects legitimacy demands made upon the organization than claims based on resource provision.

Second, the papers in this special issue contribute to an exploration of the types of internal governance instruments that are available for CSOs across a range of different types of sub-sectors and organizations, as seen from different scholarly disciplines. In line with Enjolras' (2009) argument about CSOs displaying distinct governance structures, this special issue thus presents a set of articles that approach the specificity of CSO governance from a set of different angles, covering *inter alia* board-employee relations, the norms underlying the management of volunteers, and the functioning of democracy within traditional mass movements.

Kreutzer and Jacobs provide us with a conceptual model for discussing the relationship between the governing body and the executive function of CSOs by balancing a principal-agent and a stewardship approach. The first approach assumes a control perspective on the relationship and its proponents strive to deal with how the board can control or curb the employees in its ambition to secure the organization's interests. The stewardship model, on the other hand, presupposes a common or shared interest (ideology, faith, etc.) between the board members and the executive in the mission of the organization and focuses instead on how the board can support or guide the executive ("the steward") in his or her strive to achieve the goals of the organization. Based on the claim that CSO governance often presents conflicting demands, Kreutzer and Jacobs argue that these two models should co-exist and be used intermittently.

Vantilborgh and co-authors take their starting point in psychological contract theory, and use it to discuss how the relation between CSOs and volunteers may be challenged under conditions of change. In particular, two types of change are taken into account—the increasing reflexivity of volunteers and the professionalization of CSOs. Each of these types of mismatch may create a breach in the psychological contract underlying the CSO–volunteer relationship, and hence a need for adaptation on behalf of the organization.

Einarsson also locates his discussion about CSO governance within a context of change. Based on a longitudinal study of a traditional Swedish mass-movement organization, he shows how this CSO was able to reverse oligarchic tendencies and to redirect its activities back to core societal concerns. Einarsson argues that this process was enabled by the democratic checks and balances established within the organization—the deliberative and democratic procedures and the rights inherent in membership. His paper provides valuable specifications and an empirical demonstration of the checks and balances implied in this particular type of CSO.

Taken together these papers demonstrate how governance involves a variety of levels and aspects of a CSO. Even though the operations of the board remain crucial, this role can be discussed and contextualized through the discussion of the whole set of governance structures that are put in the organizations and the norms attached to these. This brings us to a *third* interesting contribution of this special issue, which is the exploration of the importance of the discursive, institutional, and normative context for CSG. Thus, several of the papers increase our awareness as to how CSO governance is always related to some kind of real or imagined collectivity, with given normative expectations or ideational foundations.

Vercher and *Chemin* demonstrate in their paper that organization as a useful model can emerge from the 'nebula' of social movement. Within new activist coalitions, there is a need for coordination and for governance mechanisms able to address a large variety of institutional logics and decision-making. It means that, in such complex environment, steering structures should be able to play with polysemic instruments and to accommodate with different levels of governance.

Lang's paper explores the governance of community co-operatives and shows that it is based on place-bound values. It's interesting to see that these organizations are not only member focused but try to act on behalf of a collective identity. As a

result, the co-operative practices have a dual orientation toward disciplining the community and toward empowering community-initiated self-organization.

Finally, *Maier's and Meyer's* paper provides a valuable meta-perspective on how internal CSO governance is shaped by its discursive context. Based on the study of 16 Austrian CSOs, they develop an empirically grounded typology of five discourses of organization in CSOs: managerialist, domestic, professionalist, grassroots, and civic discourse. In discussing the reasons behind these manifold notions of governance in CSOs, Maier and Meyer make accountability a core concept: To whom is the NPO accountable, for what kind of performance is the NPO, and which mechanisms are appropriate to ensure accountability?

The Internal–External Relationship and Future Research

In different ways, the papers in this special issue thus provide us with insights into the intertwined external-internal aspects of CSO governance, whether it is through formal representation and board composition, through democratic structures, through the formulation of goals or through normative expectations. Their emphasis and their contribution is more on the impact of external governance to internal governance than the other way round, but by providing this connection they also provide some starting points for reflecting upon the consequences of internal governance to external governance.

Within the literature on new forms of external governance, two visions of the roles of CSOs in governance processes are outlined. On the one hand, the involvement of CSOs in societal governance may contribute to increased citizen participation; by enhancing democratic skills and involvement, by creating solidarity and by forging shared identities. On the other hand, the role of CSOs may be more instrumental, and consist in enhancing the quality and efficiency of governance (Bozzini and Enjolras 2011, p. 18). Starting from the discourse theoretical perspective developed in Maier and Meyer's article it is possible to develop a reflection upon how different CSO internal governance styles make CSOs apt to contribute either to participatory or efficient governance (or to both). For example, one may imagine that a civic style of internal governance might be supportive for a CSO to play a role in democratic legitimation, while a grassroots-style of internal governance might contribute to mobilizing participation and forging issues of public concern. On the other hand a more managerialist style or professionalist-style governance might allow for the CSO to take an expert-role in external governance, thus contributing to efficient governance.

The different contributions of this special issue highlight the complex set of internal mechanisms in CSOs that may be at play in shaping such different types of external output. Young's and Rehli and Jäger's papers center their focus on the board and make the argument that both resource-mobilization and mission related output are dependent on board composition. Inherent to this argument are logics of competition between interests, and the assumption that board composition is a key element in institutionalizing a balance between such interests. Depending on the representation of stakeholders such as volunteers, donors, or government one might

assume different orientations and abilities of the CSO to either mobilize participation, give voice to interests or to ensure instrumental results that are in line with public policies or with donors' orientations. Einarsson's paper, on the other hand, makes us aware of a broader set of governance mechanisms that are of importance to the roles CSOs play in external governance. The thrust of Einarsson's argument is that the ability of the Swedish temperance movement to assess changing needs and demands of its constituency depended on its democratic system and culture; most importantly the access to membership and to representation in the general assembly. This system of governance then impacted on the temperance movement's role in mobilizing participation and in formulating interests from the grassroots level, both of which are of importance to external governance. Finally, several of the articles in this special issue remind us that the instruments and tools used in the internal governance of CSOs are not innocent in shaping their role in external governance. For example, Vercher and Chemin show how the choice of a particular instrument, "the report card", by the French anti-sweatshop movement led to a break down in the possibilities to play a role as dialog partner with major companies to help them improve working conditions along their supply chain, which again led to a revision of the leading ideas of the movement. Using a psychological contract perspective, Vantilborgh et al. argue that the relationship between CSOs and volunteers rests on a set of normative assumptions that may be confirmed or breached through the use of different inducements or tools of governance. The capacity of the organization to mobilize support and to create solidarity and shared identity may thus depend on micro-level tools.

These reflections on the internal–external governance relationship based on the articles in this special issue are by no means exhaustive, but may mark some points of entry into the establishment of such a link in studies of CSO governance. Going back to Enjolras' (2009) argument that CSOs display specific sets of governance structures, we believe that bringing the fields of internal and external governance together may provide a fruitful way of exploring these specificities. If, as Enjolras argues, CSO governance structures are characterized by making possible the pooling of resources and the facilitation collective action, their different modalities should stand out even more clearly if we consider both their internal and external pre-conditions and effects, and how these are related. Such an approach could for example serve to highlight the tension between certain structures for mobilizing and representing different groups and the societal roles that are undertaken by CSOs.

To conclude, some tentative directions for such the endeavor of developing an internal–external perspective on CSO governance can be pointed out. *First*, there is a need to consider the unit of analysis in studies of CSO governance. If the organization is taken as the unit of analysis, the organization's role in external governance is difficult to assess, other than as the declared intentions of the CSO itself. Several approaches seem fruitful in relation to this problem. One is to move focus from organizations to relationships between organizations and their constituencies. Another approach would be to take the cue from studies of external governance and focus more on interactions between different actors within specific policy fields, for example in local contexts. *Second*, we believe that there is much to be gained by comparative efforts, between different types of CSOs, different sub-sectors of civil

society and between national contexts. In order to assess how different governance structures work, in mobilizing and coordinating agency, and in achieving defined aims, it is of great value to compare the effect of different structures in different contexts. As part of such an effort the juxtaposition and increased dialog between the nonprofit literatures and the literatures focused on voluntary associations and social movements seems like a promising path. These literatures have emerged out of different national contexts and emphasize different aspects of external governance, the former being more focused on instrumental aspects of governance and the latter more on participatory aspects, but could be brought together under a joint focus on the pooling of resources and the facilitation of collective action. *Third*, it is of great value to maintain and enhance the field of research on CSO governance as a cross-disciplinary field. As we believe that this special issue might serve to illustrate, the use of different theoretical perspectives and empirical approaches—ranging from psychology to philosophic reflection—from large surveys of organizational fields to in-depth qualitative studies—serves to bring out the multifaceted character of CSO governance. It is our hope that this collection of texts might also contribute to generating new questions to be researched and explored.

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